

## Fact Sheet

# Ringworm

Also Known As: Tinea



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## What is Ringworm?



Ringworm is a common infection of the skin and nails that is caused by fungus. The infection is called “ringworm” because it can cause an itchy, red, circular rash. Ringworm is also called “tinea” or “dermatophytosis.” The different types of ringworm are usually named for the location of the infection on the body.

- Areas of the body that can be affected by ringworm include:
- Feet (tinea pedis, commonly called “athlete’s foot”)
- Groin, inner thighs, or buttocks (tinea cruris, commonly called “jock itch”)
- Scalp (tinea capitis)
- Beard (tinea barbae)
- Hands (tinea manuum)
- Toenails or fingernails (tinea unguium, also called “onychomycosis”)
- Other parts of the body such as arms or legs (tinea corporis)

Approximately 40 different species of fungi can cause ringworm; the scientific names for the types of fungi that cause ringworm are Trichophyton, Microsporum, and Epidermophyton.

## How is it Spread?

Ringworm is a contagious fungal infection caused by mold-like parasites that live on the cells in the outer layer of your skin. It can be spread in the following ways:

- **Human to human.** Ringworm often spreads by direct, skin-to-skin contact with an infected person.
- **Animal to human.** You can contract ringworm by touching an animal with ringworm. Ringworm can spread while petting or grooming dogs or cats. It's also fairly common in cows.
- **Object to human.** Ringworm can spread by contact with objects or surfaces that an infected person or animal has recently touched or rubbed against, such as clothing, towels, bedding and linens, combs, and brushes.
- **Soil to human.** In rare cases, ringworm can be spread to humans by contact with infected soil. Infection would most likely occur only from prolonged contact with highly infected soil.

## Symptoms

Ringworm can affect skin on almost any part of the body as well as fingernails and toenails. The symptoms of ringworm often depend on which part of the body is infected, but they generally include:

- Itchy skin
- Ring-shaped rash
- Red, scaly, cracked skin
- Hair loss

Symptoms typically appear between 4 and 14 days after the skin comes in contact with the fungi that cause ringworm.

## Diagnosis

Your healthcare provider can usually diagnose ringworm by looking at the affected skin and asking questions about your symptoms. He or she may also take a small skin scraping to be examined under a microscope or sent to a laboratory for a fungal culture.

## Treatment

The treatment for ringworm depends on its location on the body and how serious the infection is. Some forms of ringworm can be treated with non-prescription (“over-the-counter”) medications, but other forms of ringworm need treatment with prescription antifungal medication.

## Prevention

- Keep your skin clean and dry.
- Wear shoes that allow air to circulate freely around your feet.
- Don’t walk barefoot in areas like locker rooms or public showers.
- Clip your fingernails and toenails short and keep them clean.
- Change your socks and underwear at least once a day.
- Don’t share clothing, towels, sheets, or other personal items with someone who has ringworm.
- Wash your hands with soap and running water after playing with pets. If you suspect that your pet has ringworm, take it to see a veterinarian. If your pet has ringworm, follow the steps below to prevent spreading the infection.



If you’re an athlete involved in close contact sports, shower immediately after your practice session or match, and keep all of your sports gear and uniform clean. Don’t share sports gear (helmet, etc.) with other players.

## Who is at Risk?

Ringworm is very common. Anyone can get ringworm, but people who have weakened immune systems may be especially at risk for infection and may have problems fighting off a ringworm infection. People who use public showers or locker rooms, athletes (particularly those who are involved in contact sports such as wrestling), people who wear tight shoes and have excessive sweating, and people who have close contact with animals may also be more likely to come in contact with the fungi that cause ringworm.



**For more sources of information on this topic visit:**

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT [www.scchealth.co](http://www.scchealth.co)

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES [www.michigan.gov/mdhhs](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs)

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

THE MAYO CLINIC [www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)